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## If not for the trees

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Saturday, April 30, 2011

This is the time of year when we officially note how amazing trees are. Besides being majestically beautiful, they are protectors - absorbing carbon dioxide, pollutants and odors and filtering air particles by trapping them on their leaves and bark.

They shield us from ultraviolet rays. They stop soil erosion and help us conserve energy by shading and cooling homes. They provide oxygen, habitats for wildlife, building materials, food and fuel. They hide ugly walls, parking lots and other unsightly views.

The list goes on.

Well over a century ago, a Nebraska tree lover who happened to be a journalist used his forum to write articles promoting the wonders of trees, eventually getting the public to see that it was a worthy effort to set aside a day once a year to plant lots of them. J. Sterling Morton from Michigan was a pilgrim to the Nebraska territory in 1854. He became intent on seeing the treeless plains transformed.

Through his efforts, the idea of celebrating Arbor Day caught on across the country in the 1870s. It has long been celebrated on the last Friday of the month (Morton's birthday was April 22), although some states mark it at different times determined by prime planting weather.

This year, around here, notable efforts are being made in Northampton and Amherst to mark the day.

Northampton's Tree Committee handed out saplings Friday and is doing so again today, Saturday.

On Saturday residents who signed up last week can collect one of the 120 saplings being distributed at Smith Vocational and Agricultural High School. Using a grant awarded to the city by the state Department of Conservation and Recreation's Urban and Community Forestry Program, the Tree Committee will give away 12 species of trees, all in 7- to 10-gallon containers. Many of them are choice species such as Stewartia, Kousa dogwood, redbud, tupelo and Princeton elm. Residents are being asked to plant the trees near a public way, or within public view for the benefit of everyone. "What we don't want is for people to plant them in the backyards," said Susan Ford, a former tree committee member who applied for the grant.

On the day of the giveaway, residents will be required to attend a tree-planting demonstration conducted by Amherst Tree Warden Alan Snow, a DCR forester, that will cover where to place them.

In Amherst, the Shade Tree Committee is attempting to enlist the faith communities in town in its efforts to plant trees along public ways.

The idea, according to committee leader Hope Crolus, is to get each one of the 21 churches, mosques, synagogues and temples to put one or more of the new trees offered by the committee



GAZETTE FILE PHOTO

People gather in Amherst to plant a ginkgo biloba tree on the sidewalk along North Pleasant Street. This year, the town's Shade Tree Committee is working with faith communities to plant and care for trees.



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into the ground and then take care of watering, mulching and pruning them. Though the official goal is to get 25 planted this year, Crolius said the invitation to the churches is part of a larger effort by her panel to get 100 trees planted to offset the number she estimates the town loses each year.

There is road work going on in several areas of town over the next few months, and Crolius says Tree Warden Snow is working with the Department of Public Works to make sure that tree planting is done in conjunction with the rebuilding and resurfacing of the streets.

It is heartening to see these efforts taking place. So many years after J. Sterling Morton saw the need to stir public interest in trees, people are mobilized to take care of this generous life form. It's easy to take this lush resource for granted; thankfully, not everybody does.

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